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# **Hymn Writing** **in** **Aboriginal Languages**

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**Marion M. Cowan**

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**Hymn Writing**  
**in**  
**Aboriginal Languages**

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**Summer Institute of Linguistics**  
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# Table of Contents

PART I	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
PART II	MUSIC SIGNS AND SYMBOLS . . . . .	2
PART III	SETTING WORDS TO EXISTING HYMN TUNES . . . . .	6
	A. Choice of hymn tunes . . . . .	6
	(1) Choose well-known congregational hymn tunes . . . . .	6
	(2) Choose tunes with repetition . . . . .	6
	(3) Avoid solos and duets . . . . .	7
	(4) Choose tunes from the hymnbook of the church organization operating in your territory . . . . .	7
	(5) Choruses may be used. . . . .	7
	B. Basic facts to consider and incorporate in hymn translation . . . . .	8
	(1) Aim for one syllable to each note of music . . . . .	8
	(2) Adhere to the meter of the hymn . . . . .	9
	(3) Avoid changing the value of the notes . . . . .	10
	(4) Make word stress and musical accent coincide. . . . .	10
	(5) The significance of making verses rhyme . . . . .	11
	C. Word composition of hymns. . . . .	12
	(1) Build your hymns to convey a message . . . . .	12
	(2) Aim at one thought to a line of music. . . . .	12
	(3) Write three or four verses to each hymn. . . . .	13
	D. Translating hymns from a written to an unwritten language. . . . .	14
PART IV	SUGGESTIONS FOR HYMN WRITING IN TONAL LANGUAGES . . . . .	15
	A. Translating or composing words for existing hymn tunes	15
	B. Composing hymn tunes to coincide with the tones of the language. . . . .	16
	(1) METHOD 1 - assigning a given portion of the scale to the various phonemic tone levels and glides. . . . .	16
	(2) METHOD 2 - keeping relative tones of the language within syntactic constructions and reflecting them in the melody. . . . .	20
PART V	TRY OUT YOUR HYMNS BEFORE PRINTING THEM . . . . .	27
PART VI	RECORDING HYMNS . . . . .	28



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# Part I

## INTRODUCTION

Many tribes and races of people have their own tribal music but in a few tribes in southern Mexico, no songs have as yet been found. Among the tribes of the world different types of music are heard, some of which sound weird, even minor, to those who have known music written in the traditional occidental scale. There is the chanting type of music and the rhythmic type of drum beating. To analyze the music of two thousand tribes would be a lifetime job.

This syllabus is written for those who wish to use the traditional occidental musical octave scale as a basis for writing or composing hymns in an aboriginal language. It would be advantageous if the hymn writer would listen to the music of the tribespeople and try to incorporate the rhythmic patterns of the tribal tunes wherever possible. Their hymns would sound more like native music and perhaps be more readily accepted by the people. On the other hand, if the tribal music is so bound in with the former religious practices that the two cannot be separated in the people's thinking, then the tribesmen may prefer an altogether different type of music when they become Christians.

Look for the musical vocabulary of the people. Notice the words used to express a high voice, a low voice, a high note, a low note. The chapter on musical signs and symbols may suggest musical terms that may occur in the language. The following shows four ways of expressing musical notes in four different languages.

<u>English</u>	<u>Chol</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Tseltal</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>Cuicateco</u> <sup>3</sup>
high notes	tight notes	it comes out little	thin notes
low notes	heavy notes	it comes out big	thick notes

If there are native instruments, notice the kind of music they play and equate their notes with notes on the scale. If this is not possible, then fit the notes to the scale as best you can and try using them. The Tzotzil<sup>4</sup> tribe of southern Mexico has only five notes equivalent to the notes do-re-mi-fa-sol of the occidental scale. The workers used the whole scale and taught the people to sing the other notes. It is therefore possible to use the native music, chanting and tunes, and compose words to go with the native type of music. Further study and work in various tribes would have to be done before methods could be incorporated in this syllabus.

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<sup>1</sup>Chol Indian tribe located in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

<sup>2</sup>Tseltal Indian tribe located in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

<sup>3</sup>Cuicateco Indian tribe located in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico.

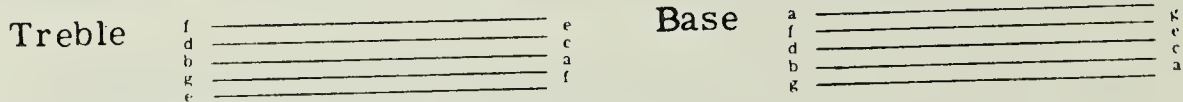
<sup>4</sup>Tzotzil Indian tribe located in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

# Part II

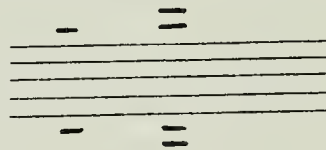
## MUSIC SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Not all of the music signs or symbols are given but the most important ones are listed.

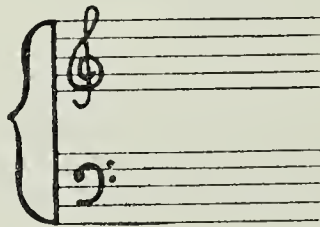
1. Staff: There are two staves, treble and base, each containing five parallel lines and four spaces where the notes are written.



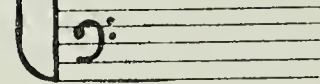
2. Ledger lines: Lines used to extend the compass of the staff above or below.



3. Treble clef marker:



4. Base clef marker:

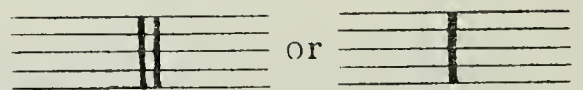


The staves are connected by a straight line and a brace when notes in each staff are rendered at the same time.

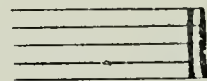
5. Bars or vertical lines: Lines used to mark off the measures.



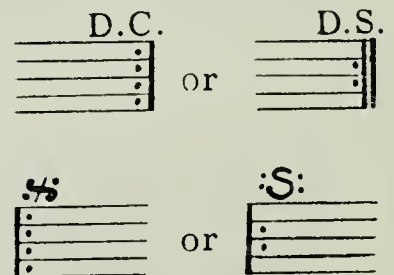
6. Double bars in two forms: Used to mark the end of a larger division, as a verse.



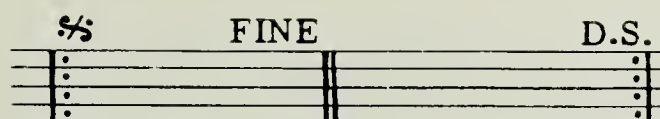
7. Close: Used to mark the end of the composition.



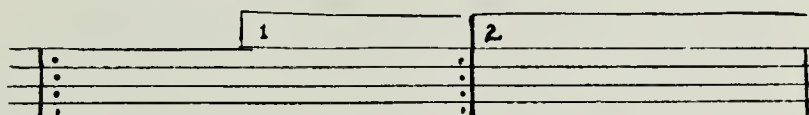
8. Repeat: Da Capo, written D. C. usually above the staff, means to repeat from the beginning to the point indicated. Dal Segno, written D: S. above the staff, with or without dots in the spaces, means to begin the repetition at the specified signal, usually ♪ or :S: placed above the staff at some preceding point. The end of the repeat is indicated by the word FINE written above the staff.







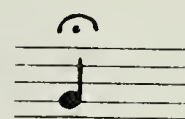
In some hymns the repeat is indicated with dots and numbers in which case you repeat from the dots up to number 1, then play or sing portion 2.



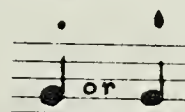
9. Notes: (1) Notes have tone value according to their place on the staff and the stems of the notes may be turned up or down. In the notes cited below, the stems are turned down for convenience. (2) Notes have time value or duration and are named according to their time value. (3) Followed by a dot, they increase their value by  $1/2$ . Two dots increase their value  $1/2$  and  $1/4$ .

$$d. = \text{quarter note} ; \quad d.. = \text{half note}$$

- (4) A hold over the note indicates the note should be prolonged (  $\frown$  ).



- (5) A staccato over the note indicates a short disconnected note ( . or ' ).



- (6) A tie or bind connects two notes of the same degree and the two are combined and rendered as if they were one note.

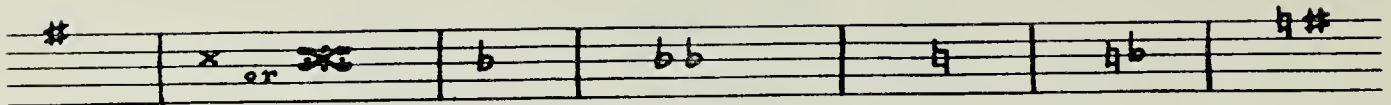


whole      half      quarter      eighth      sixteenth      thirty-second



10. Rests: Rests are pauses in music with varying symbols, each symbol having a different time value as illustrated above.

11. Sharps, flats and natural or cancel are used to indicate different keys and to change the tone of notes. Any sharp or flat placed on a line or a space at the beginning of a line is used to indicate the key signature while any sharp or flat placed immediately before a note in the composition raises or lowers, respectively, the normal tone of the note in that measure only.



sharp, double sharp, flat, double flat, natural, cancel, cancel

More than one sharp or one flat may occur in the key signature, and various keys are indicated by the number of sharps or flats. The line or space above the last sharp indicated is where the first note of the octave, namely "do", will fall, while the line or space above the last flat indicated is where the note "sol" of the octave will be.

12. **Time Signature:** Indicated at the beginning of the composition by two cardinal numbers, written in the form of a fraction. The number above indicates how many beats there are to a measure while the number below indicates the type of note that receives one beat in the composition.

Examples:

$\frac{3}{4}$  time - 3 beats to a measure of music;  
a quarter note gets one beat and the 1st  
beat of each measure is accented.  
e.g. We Praise Thee, O God.

$\frac{3}{2}$  time - Same as  $\frac{3}{4}$  time except that a half note gets one beat.  
e.g. O For a Thousand Tongues.

**C** or  $\frac{4}{4}$  time - 4 beats to a measure;  
a quarter note gets one beat, and  
the 1st and 3rd beats of each measure  
are accented.  
e.g. Down at the Cross Where My Saviour Died.

$\frac{2}{2}$  time - Count as 4 beats to a measure with a quarter note  
getting one beat.  
1st and 3rd beats are accented.  
e.g. Break Thou the Bread of Life.

$\frac{2}{4}$  time - Count as 4 beats to a measure with an eighth note  
getting one beat.  
1st and 3rd beats are accented.  
e.g. Jesus Loves Me.

$\frac{6}{8}$  time - 6 beats to a measure;  
an 8th note gets one beat, and  
the 1st and 4th beats are accented.  
e.g. I Gave My Life for Thee.

$\frac{6}{4}$  time - Same as  $\frac{6}{8}$  time except that a quarter note gets one beat.  $\frac{6}{8}$   
e.g. The Glory Song.

$\frac{9}{8}$  time - 9 beats to a measure;  
an 8th note gets one beat, and  
the 1st, 4th, and 7th beats are accented.  
e.g. Blessed Assurance.

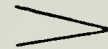
$\frac{9}{4}$  time - Same as  $\frac{9}{8}$  time except a quarter note gets one beat.  $\frac{9}{8}$   
e.g. Have Thine Own Way, Lord.

$\frac{12}{8}$  time - 12 beats to a measure;  
an 8th note gets one beat, and  
the 1st, 4th, 7th and 10th beats are accented.  
e.g. I've Found a Friend Who Is All to Me.

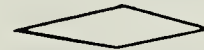
13. Crescendo: gradually louder



Decrescendo or diminuendo: gradually softer



Swell: first crescendo, then decrescendo



These three signs are written above the five lines of the staff.

# Part III

## SETTING WORDS TO EXISTING HYMN TUNES

### A. CHOICE OF HYMN TUNES

(1) Choose well-known congregational hymn tunes. Tunes that have a rhythm which is easily learned are the ones sung best by congregations in the homeland. If an American congregation finds a hymn hard to sing it will be that much harder for the native congregation to sing it; for they have had far less musical background than any of the congregations in the homeland. Examples of hymns with easy tunes and good rhythm are:

#### English tunes

Bringing in the Sheaves  
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today  
Come to the Savior, Make no Delay  
Count Your Blessings  
Face to Face  
Glory to His Name  
God Be with You Till We Meet Again  
He Leadeth Me  
He Lives  
Higher Ground  
I Am Thine, O Lord  
I Gave My Life for Thee  
In the Sweet Bye and Bye  
Jesus Is All the World to Me  
Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
No Night There  
Onward Christian Soldiers  
Power in the Blood  
Silent Night  
The Glory Song  
The Old Rugged Cross  
What a Friend We Have in Jesus  
When I See the Blood  
When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder  
Wonderful Words of Life  
Ye Must Be Born Again

#### Spanish tunes

O Cristo Mio (tune "Juanita")  
Tu Dejaste Tu Trono

(2) Choose tunes with repetition. Tunes in which portions of the music are repeated several times are easy for the tribesmen to learn to sing. They are catchy tunes.



**Examples:     English tunes**

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing  
Jesus Loves Me  
Jesus Saves  
No, Not One  
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus  
Power in the Blood  
The Comforter Has Come  
The Light of the World  
Trust and Obey

**Spanish tunes**

No Puede el Mundo Ser Mi Hogar  
No Te De Temor

(3) Avoid solos and duets. Special numbers are written for trained voices and are difficult for persons with untrained voices to sing. Also, some hymns were never written for congregational singing, such as "Precious Hiding Place", "Search Me, O God", "The Love of God", "The King's Business", and others.

(4) Choose tunes from the hymnbook of the church organization operating in your territory. There are several reasons for this. First, the pastors in the area when visiting the congregations of believers will recognize and know the tunes and attempt to sing in the idiom, even if they do not speak it. They will try singing in a language that is foreign to them rather than to insist that the people sing in the trade language which they do not understand. Second, these pastors will feel that you are cooperating with them in that you are using the tunes in their hymnbook, rather than introducing foreign ones from your own country. Third, if you put at the bottom of each native hymn the number of the corresponding hymn tune in the church hymnbook of the nationals, this will indicate to the pastors your use of their church tunes. It will also help new workers in your area, who, if unable to spend time with you learning the tunes, may find the music in the church hymnbook of the region.

(5) Choruses may be used. Some very good hymns have been written to chorus tunes. The tribesmen like the lilting music and seem to learn them quickly. The tunes are catchy and short. You may want to write 3 or 4 verses to the tune. Choruses of well-known hymns also may be used as hymn tunes.

Among the Chol hymns is one written to the last four lines of the chorus of "Master, the Tempest Is Raging" and has 3 verses. The Chol people learned it easily and sing it well. The English translation of it is:

Came Christ at night  
He came from God there in heaven,  
He was born as a child  
Our Lord Jesus.

He showed the goodness of His heart  
He left His home there in heaven,  
He came down right to the earth,  
Our Lord Jesus.

There was not His home in the world,  
Christ Jesus, the Son of God,  
He looks for a resting-place in your heart,  
Our Lord Jesus.

A Tseltal hymn has been written to the chorus "There'll be no sorrow there in my Father's house". The Tseltal people like the repetition in it. The translation is:

There will be no more trouble  
There where Jesus is, there where Jesus is, there  
    where Jesus is,  
There will be no more trouble there where Jesus is,  
Forever happiness.

There will be no more sickness,  
There where Jesus is, etc.  
Forever goodness (health).

There will be no more death,  
There where Jesus is, etc.  
Forever life.

It will not get dark,  
There where Jesus is, etc.  
Forever God's glory.

## B: BASIC FACTS TO CONSIDER AND INCORPORATE IN HYMN TRANSLATION

(1) Aim for one syllable to each note of music. This is not always possible but you should try for it. It is one of the secrets of good hymn writing. In two or three tribes where we have taught the people to sing, we observed that the believers would not sing notes which did not have words or syllables to go with them. Such "extra" notes were completely ignored by the people.

If there are little runs or triplets anywhere in the tune which are sung on a one-syllable English word, the tribespeople may not bother to sing these unless there are words or syllables of words to go with each note. For example, take the hymn "I Gave My Life for Thee". In English, there is a little phrase of notes at the end of the first and third lines which is sung on the single syllables "thee" and "be" respectively in the first verse. The Tseltal version of this hymn very nicely includes these couplets keeping the tune intact and colorful.

Namey woklaj ta krus Kristo Jesus ta skaj jmultik  
 I gave my life for thee - - - my prec-ious blood I shed

La sts'ik bayal swokol och ch'ix ta sjol  
 That thou might'st ran-somed be - - - and quick-

Tey cham ku'untik.  
 ened from the dead.

(This is a comparison of English and Tseltal syllables, not a translation of the Tseltal words.) A similar thing was done with the tune "Christ, the Lord is Risen Today", words being supplied to the notes to which we sing only "Hallelujah" in English.

(2) Adhere to the meter of the hymn. All hymns have what is called meter. Meter may be defined as "the arrangement of beats or accents in a line of poetry". The meter of any poem or piece of poetry is found by counting the number of syllables occurring in the lines of the poem. All verses of a hymn have the same meter although individual lines may not have the same number of syllables. You will notice that for each note of music there is a word syllable.

For example, in the following hymn, the meter is 8.6.8.6.8.8.8.3.

Jé-sus-is-ál-the-wórld-to-mé	8 syllables
My-lífe-my-jóy-my-áll	6 "
He-ís-my-st réngth-from-dáy-to-dáy	8 "
With-óut-Him-Í-would-fáll	6 "
Whén-I-am-sád-to-Hím-I-gó	8 "
Nó-oth-er-óne-can-chéer-me-só	8 "
Whén-I-am-sád-Hé-makes-me-glád	8 "
Hé's-mý-friénd.	3 "

In some hymns the meter may be the same throughout as in the following hymn with a meter of 8.8.8.8.8.8.

My-hópe-is-built-on-nóth-ing-less	8 syllables
Than-Jé-sus-blood-and-ríght-eous-ness	8 "
I-dáre-not-trust-the-swéet-est-frame	8 "
But-whól-ly-lean-on-Jé-sus-name.	8 "



On - Chríst - the - sol - id - róck - I - stand 8 syllables

All - óth - er - ground - is - sínk - ing - sand. 8 "

(3) Avoid changing the value of the notes. Avoid breaking down half notes or dotted notes to accommodate more syllables. If there is no alternative, however, this can be done successfully if a rhythm pattern is kept throughout the hymn (see number 4 of this section). Once you have changed the value of the notes by adding or subtracting beats, use the same tune for all of the verses of the hymn.

(4) Make word stress and musical accent coincide. A hymn goes over best when the words are sung with the stress occurring in the same place as when used in everyday speech. To do this with our hymns we must know something about rhythm. All hymns must have rhythm. This is the most important point of all and the base of any song. Rhythm may be defined as "the regular repetition of accented beats". The time signature at the beginning of a piece of music indicates the rhythm of the piece.

Be on the watch for hymns that have their choruses written in different time than their verse. They are indicated by a time signature at the beginning of the chorus as in the hymn "I've Found a Friend Who Is All to Me". The verse is  $\frac{12}{8}$  time and the chorus is  $\frac{6}{8}$  time.

Workers in one of the tribes in Mexico first started writing hymns without paying attention to the correlation between word stress and musical accent. The matter of making word stress and musical accent coincide was brought to their attention. Now the workers are finding that the hymns they have written in which the word stress falls on the accented notes of the music are more easily learned, better sung, and better understood, than the ones they wrote in which they did not pay attention to this point.

In hymns in English note how word stress falls on the accented beats of music. The following hymn is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with the accent on the first beat of each measure of the music. The numbers below the words indicate the beats.

Come Thou Fount of every blessing  
3 & 1 2 3 & 1 2

Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.  
3 & 1 2 3 & 1-2

Streams of mércy, never céasing  
3 & 1 2 3 & 1 2

Call for sोंgs of loudest práise.  
3 & 1 2 3 & 1-2



The following is in 4/4 time with the accent on the 1st and 3rd beats of each measure.

Would you be frée from the búrden of sín?  
 1 2 & 3 4 & 1 2 & 3-4

There's pów'r in the blóod, pów'r in the blóod;  
 & 1 2 & 3-4 1 2 & 3-4

Wóuld you o'er évil a víctory wín?  
 1 2 & 3 4 & 1 2 & 3-4

There's wónderful pów'r in the blóod.  
 & 1 2 & 3 4 & 1-2-3

Those working in Aztec<sup>1</sup> find that many of the hymn tunes as written do not lend themselves to Aztec words where the stress falls, with few exceptions, on the next to the last syllable of the word. However, there is a solution to this problem. The last note at the ends of the lines of music can be broken down into two notes of lesser value (a half note into two quarter notes, a quarter note into two eighth notes, etc.) to accommodate the final syllable. This, then, will bring the word stress on the accented musical beat. For example, a tune may be arranged as follows:

(chgd) (chgd)

When we walk with the Lord ( - ) in the light of his Word ( - ) what a  
 Christ Je-sus Scriptures

(chgd) (chgd)

glory he sheds on our way ( - ) when we do his good will ( - ) he a-  
 pathway pleasure

(chgd) (chgd)

bides with us still ( - ) ne-ver fear on-ly trust and o-bey ( - )  
 e-ver him

(5) The significance of making verses rhyme. Poetry has rhyme at the end of certain lines or it is called blank verse. Rhyming words at the end of lines in hymns are desirable but not essential. In some languages it is hard to find words that rhyme for the end of lines. It is

<sup>1</sup> A language spoken in southern Mexico.

easy to find such words in the Mayan<sup>1</sup> languages and therefore easy to keep a rhyme pattern where it is desired.

Rhyming should be kept in mind as a goal as it is valuable in teaching the hymns. The words of hymns with rhyme are easier for the tribespeople to memorize. The lack of rhyming, however, does not destroy the message conveyed in a hymn. It is easier to set music to verses if the verses have even lines. Also the fact that they have even lines is an aid in making verses rhyme.

### C. WORD COMPOSITION OF HYMNS

(1) Build your hymns to convey a message. Each hymn should be written with a theme in mind and with the purpose of enriching the spiritual knowledge and experience of the believers, as an invitation to the lost, or to supplant former pagan<sup>2</sup> ceremonies. In this regard it is interesting to note that the Tojolobal<sup>2</sup> workers have written a funeral hymn, a wedding hymn, and a harvest hymn which the believers sing on such special occasions.

Denominational hymnbooks often have a listing of the subject matter of the hymns in the index, and these listings cover all phases of the life of Christ, hymns to God the Father, the Holy Trinity, the Lord's Day, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, Invitation, Repentance and Confession, Consecration, Prayer and Intercession, Assurance, Challenge, Christmas, Comfort, Confidence, Conflict, Devotional, Missions, Evangelism, Faith, Fellowship, Guidance, Heaven, Love, Loyalty, Petition, Praise, Salvation, Second Coming, Surrender, Stewardship, Witnessing, Worship and Adoration, and Children's Hymns. Under Children's Hymns, a chorus or two can be written for three, four, or five-year-olds who love to sing if the song is simple enough. It is a good way for them to carry the truth home.

(2) Aim at one thought to a line of music. We have found that when the tribespeople sing by themselves, they have a tendency to pause at the end of each line whether there is a pause in the music or not. If a thought is carried over two or three lines of the music, it is broken in the tribesman's mind at the end of each line. The four lines of a verse must carry a sequence of thought, of course, but each line can be complete in itself. Notice the English translation of the Tseltal hymn to the tune "Count Your Blessings".

We were in sin until Jesus came,  
Our sins He bore for us on the cross.  
Because of us, died on the cross our Lord.  
Paid is our sin, thus free we are (or thus saved we are).

---

<sup>1</sup>A family of languages in southern Mexico.

<sup>2</sup>An Indian tribe located in the southernmost part of Mexico.

Chorus -  
All the time remember Jesus  
This one Who paid for you your sin on the cross.  
While still today to life you can go  
Thank Him, Christ, Who helped you.

Turn your heart (repent) before the Lord  
He will pardon your sin today.  
Talk to Christ, living in heaven,  
No matter how much your sin He will forget it from His heart.  
(He will forgive you).

Also notice the English translation of the Chol hymn to the tune "Come to the Savior, Make no Delay".

Draw near to Jesus Christ, come believe His Word  
Only Jesus Christ is able to help you.  
Come leave your sin, listen to what is good,  
Christ is talking to you.

Chorus -  
Come, listen to the Word of our Holy Father  
He wants you to find only what is very good.  
Christ is able to help you, He knows how to guide you,  
Come, believe His Word now.

I am coming Jesus Christ, I want to believe your Word,  
I know I am lost until you help me.  
Take out of me my sin, help me now.  
Christ, I am drawing near to you.

Chorus to 2nd verse -  
I am coming Christ, show me your Word,  
Guide me on the road to heaven,  
For me you died, paid is my debt.  
For this reason I love you.

(3) Write three or four verses to each hymn. Workers in tone languages find this very difficult to do but it has its advantages over using a large number of tunes with only one verse each. When the tribesman has to sing the same tune over for three or four verses, he gets more practice each time and learns it well. On the other hand, if he has to sing four different tunes to sing four different verses, it takes him a lot longer to learn those four tunes well. This also cuts down the number of tunes to be taught so the people get the same message in a shorter length of time with less hours of labor for them and for you. We also found in some tribes that they prefer hymns with three or four verses rather than just one verse.



## D. TRANSLATING HYMNS FROM A WRITTEN TO AN UNWRITTEN LANGUAGE

If your goal is to translate hymns from one language into another, be sure you know the meaning of the words and the message of the hymn. It will be difficult in most cases to make an exact translation and have it fit the tune. Two verses may have to be written in the native language to cover one verse of the hymn already written, or portions may have to be omitted. It is better to use a free translation, that is, the ideas of the hymn, rather than use a literal translation. As the writer of the hymn, you are at liberty to use some or all of the ideas of the original hymn or choose a different theme entirely for that tune. For example, one translator wrote a hymn on the second coming of Christ to the tune "Jesus Saves".

One method used to convey the thoughts expressed in the hymn is to write out the meaning of the words in the language of the hymn in simple conversational style, just as if you were telling the message of the hymn to a group of children. The words rewritten in simple conversational style will then serve as a basis for the translation and simplify the problems involved in understanding. If a bilingual informant is available he will have a better comprehension of the message of the hymn and may be able to give a translation that will express the thought contained in the hymn, but not always. Check the vocabulary used in the hymn to see if he understands the words. It is best to translate phrase by phrase, or a whole line at a time, but not word by word.

If your bilingual informant is quick to pick up new tunes he may be trained to do the hymn translation work. Your people may insist on using the church tunes of their area as did the Totonac<sup>1</sup> Indians of Mexico. In that tribe the workers taught their informant a hymn tune, then he translated the hymn changing words where necessary until they fit the tune. With the whole language at his disposal, in this way he produced many good hymns which the believers sing today.

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<sup>1</sup>Totonac Indian tribe located in the state of Puebla, Mexico.



# Part IV

## SUGGESTIONS FOR HYMN WRITING IN TONAL LANGUAGES

In addition to the material covered in Part III there are certain features occurring in tone languages which should be taken into consideration. Tone languages have relative tone levels, tone sequences, and contours depending upon the language in question. One of the differences between music and a tone language is that music has fixed pitch while tone languages have relative pitch. Some tonal languages have the tone levels and glides on short vowels and long vowels and vowel clusters. Tone languages may have words that have the same vowels and consonants but which differ only in their tones.

This section contains a discussion of the possibility of using existing hymn tunes for hymns in tonal languages and a presentation of two methods for composing tunes based on the tones of the language.

### A. TRANSLATING OR COMPOSING WORDS FOR EXISTING HYMN TUNES

The task is not an easy one. In the first place it is best to set aside words that differ only in tone unless the musical notes reflect the relative tone pattern of the word. This limits the worker as to his choice of words and means of expression when translating or composing a hymn. It means that the choice of words may limit the message that he is endeavoring to put across in the hymn. If such words are ignored and they are used in the translation, there is a chance that the message may not be clear and may even be distorted.

In the Cuicateco language of southern Mexico many words are alike except for tone, such as: he arrived - he was cast out; with me - planting stick - fruit; life - day - name; yellow - place - between; sew - shuck corn - relay a message; etc. To disregard tone in such a language as the Cuicateco language and simply fit the words to the music is comparatively simple, but to leave out words that differ because of their tone and use the remaining vocabulary to express a vital message is a difficult task and takes hours of hard work just to translate one hymn, and then it may have ambiguities. To compile a hymnbook with hymns that have more than one verse would be almost impossible.

Where vowel length is phonemic it creates another problem when the worker is putting words to hymn tunes. The long vowels should occur on sustained notes, or notes of longer duration than the shortest note in the hymn. When the tones on the long vowels are not level tones, but glides, then the vowels should occur on more than one musical note having a difference in quality according to the movement of the glide.

The goal in translating or composing hymns in a tone language is to present hymns to the native church which will clearly convey the message desired, without any ambiguity.

## B. COMPOSING HYMN TUNES TO COINCIDE WITH THE TONES OF THE LANGUAGE

Two methods of hymn composition are referred to in this section. One is to assign a given portion of the scale to various phonemic tone levels and glides if they occur, and the other is to keep the relative tone levels within a syntactic construction.

Illustrations in Part IV are cited from the Cuicateco language, a tonal language of three phonemic levels. In Cuicateco, as in other tone languages, there are intonational patterns aside from the tone analysis. Initial high tone is higher than high and final low tone is lower than low in a syntactic construction. Tone marks will be written over the vowels as follows: high tone ( <sup>ˊ</sup> ), mid tone ( <sup>ˋ</sup> ), and low tone ( <sup>ˋˋ</sup> ). Primary word stress will be written ( <sup>ˈ</sup> ), secondary word stress ( <sup>ˈˈ</sup> ), and phrase stress ( <sup>ˆ</sup> ).

### (1) METHOD 1 - assigning a given portion of the scale to the various phonemic tone levels and glides.

Step one. The range of notes on the scale which are generally used in hymns are from middle "c" to "e" above the octave. This is a singable range of notes for congregational singing. The notes are divided into three parts to accommodate the high, mid, and low tones in Cuicateco.



Step two. Write out the words that you want to set to music writing in the stress on the words, as follows:

ń'dyũ̀s ɪ'tḗyú "grāāciā "n ʔdī "yē" ʔè chī'ngē ʔēyú

God, we give thanks to you for what we eat

ē ɪ'téénɪ "víídā "s ʔũ̀ú", mīcū ɪ'dī'ñɪ cuɪ'dáádò "s ʔũ̀ú".

you give life to us and you take care of us.



**Step three.** Number the vowels, beginning with number one after each stress mark. If you are studying a language in which glides occur on short vowels, the short vowel will receive one count. These numbers will be the guide in figuring out the number of beats to a measure.

ń'dyũ̀s ı'tēēyú "grāācià "n ʔdĩ "yē"ʔè chĩ"ngē ʔēyú

1 2 3 12 3 12 34 12 1 2 3 1 2 3

ē ı'téeni "víidà "s ʔũ̀ú", mĩcũ ı'dĩ"ni cui"dáádò "s ʔũ̀ú".

4 5 12 3 12 3 123 4 5 6 12 3 4 12 3 123

The groupings of numbers underlined go from stress to stress and must be worked into the music to correlate with the musical stress of each measure. The "u" in the word cui"dáádò is not a vowel.

Notice how the numbers run.

1-2 occurs 1 time

1-3 " 8 times

1-4 " 2 times

1-5 " 1 time


1-6 " 1 time within a stress group and has a syntactic break

after the number 3. Such syntactic breaks should not be overlooked. This can be taken care of in at least 3 ways: (1) by dividing the stress group into two measures of 1-3, (2) by sustaining the 3rd vowel, if it is permissible in the language, and depending on the time signature chosen, or (3) by putting a rest between the vowels marked 3 and 4. The second one of these was chosen in this chorus.

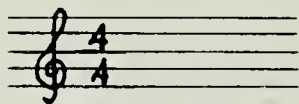
The number combination 1-3 occurs most frequently. If we were to choose 3 beats to a measure we would have to fit four counts, five counts and six counts into a measure of three counts. This would be acceptable. However, if we choose to count 4 beats to a measure it would be easier to fit two, three, five or six counts to a measure. It would be possible to choose 6 beats to a measure also. In doing so we would have to start with the number count 1-6 and fit in the other number combinations in their respective measures. Notice that there is an initial syllabic "n" that has no number before the first accent. This is left unnumbered until the number of beats per measure has been figured out.

**Step four.** Choose the time signature and the key signature.

With the numbers as a guide we choose the number of beats to a measure. We have seen that there are several choices. Let us choose to write the composition with 4 beats to a measure. The melody of a piece is written in the treble clef, so the treble clef marker is added to the composition.

We have chosen 4 beats to a measure, so next we will choose a quarter note (  ) to receive one beat of the measure. Now we are ready to add the time signature to the composition. The next thing is the choice of the key. Those who have had little music training would find it easier to write their

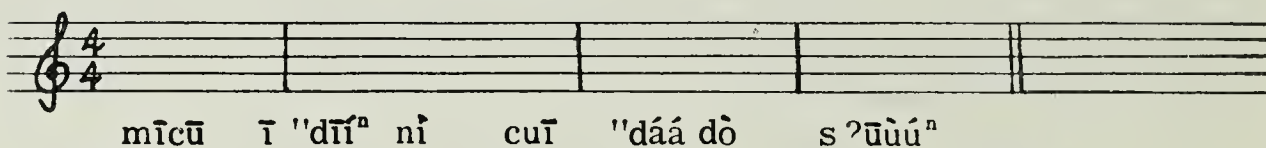
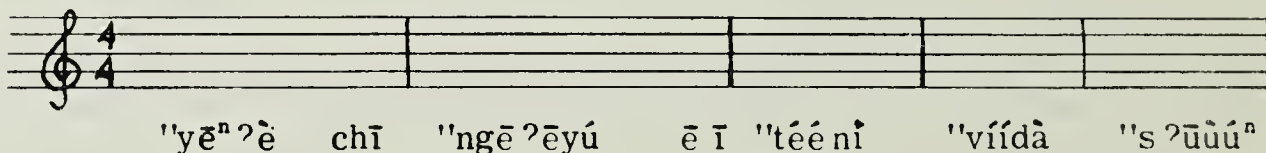
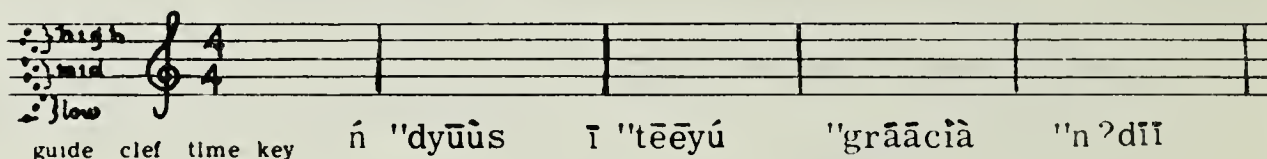
music in the key of "c" as there are no sharps or flats to add to the staff. Middle "c" is the first note of the octave then in this key and called "do". (See Step one.)



time signature:  $\frac{4}{4}$   
key: c (no # or b)

These symbols will appear at the beginning of each treble clef of the composition.

Step five. Next write the words out under the staff, leaving plenty of room between the words for marking off the measures, and the writing in of the notes. Leave room also for the guide to show you which notes will represent high, mid and low tones, the treble clef marker, the time signature and the key signature.



Step six. Composition of melody. Now we are ready for the actual composition of the melody of the piece. There is the syllabic "n̄" before the first stress so that will be the 4th beat of the first measure. Stress tends to raise the tone of the vowels so where there is a stress mark, the following vowel may be raised one note higher (or one step higher on the scale). This will not destroy the tone patterns.

It is easier to teach a song to a congregation if the song begins on the note "do", "mi" or "sol" and it is best to end the song on "sol" or "do". Since the first note begins on a high tone, we will begin the song on "c", or "do", an octave above middle "c".

Now it is a matter of trying out various notes and combinations of notes until you have a melody that is singable, one that has a catchy tune to it. It is a matter of working on it, first reading it phrase by phrase, and setting each phrase to notes.



Notice the result of the first try:

4 1-2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1-2 3-4 1-2-3-4

4 4

ń "dyūūs ī "tēē yū "grāāciā "n?dīī

1-2 3 4 1 2 3 4 + 1-2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2-3

4 4

"yē" ?ē chī "ngē ?ē yú ē ī "té é nī "vīí dà "s?ūū ú"n

4


1 2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2-3-4

4 4

mīcū ī "dī í" nī cuī "dáádō s?ū ū ú"n

What is wrong with the composition? What jumps, or intervals, are hard to sing? The parts that are single underlined are intervals that are not easy to sing and the portions that are double underlined are hard to learn because the notes are far apart on the scale. These parts must be worked on to see if a better arrangement of notes may be found. Try changing the melody where needed until it is accepted by the natives. Notice the development of the changed portion.

1-2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2-3 4 1 2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2-3-4



"té é ní "víí dā "s ʔūūúⁿ mīcū ī'dīīⁿ nīcuī'dáádó "s ʔūūúⁿ

The notes are still far apart with difficult intervals so let us make another scale division for the tones and start all over again with low as "do-re", with mid as "mi-fa", and high as "sol-la-ti-do".

4 1-2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1-2-3 4 1-2-3-4

high  
mid  
low

4/4

n̄ "dyū ūs ī "tēē yū "grāā cīā "n̄dīī

1-2 3 4 1 2 3 4 + 1-2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2 3

4/4

"yē"̄ è chī "chē"̄ ē yū ē ī "té é nī "vīī dà "s̄ū ù ú"̄

4 1 2 3 4 1-2-3 4 1 + 2-3-4

4/4

mī cū ī "dī í"̄ nī cūī "dāā dò "s̄ū ù ú"̄

When you feel you have a tune that is singable, then try it out on the tribespeople and notice their reaction. They might suggest some changes that will make it seem like their own song. Heed their advice and change it. In this chorus the underlined word "grāāciā" is a borrowed word. The original note was the low note "e" but the Cuicatecos changed it to the higher note "g" which is in the high tone bracket of this chorus. Of the two notes occurring over the syllable "grāā" in the word "grāāciā", the top note is the corrected note.

(2) METHOD 2 - keeping relative tones of the language within syntactic constructions and reflecting them in the melody. By syntactic constructions is meant phrases, clauses, a noun construction, a verb construction, etc.

There are no assigned notes to the tone registers. All notes reflect the relative tones of words within the construction and in relation to the surrounding constructions. The syntactic constructions may be shifted to higher notes or they may be shifted to lower notes as long as they keep the relativity of the tones in the construction. Constructions must jibe one with another in such a way that the final note of a construction and the beginning note of the following construction will not fall on the same note unless they have the same tone. Tones now may have a wide range of notes and afford a greater variety in the melody, or they may narrow down to just one note apart, as long as their relation to one another is preserved in the composition. This method gives a wider variety of choice of notes for the melody.

Notice the melody of the previous chorus when it is set to a tune following this method. The tune is changed in a few places, just enough to make it more singable and catchy. Syntactic constructions are noted by parenthesis.

(n'dyū ùs ī 'tēē yú 'grāāciā 'n?dī) ("yē<sup>n</sup>?è chī 'chē?ēyú)

(ē ī 'té é nī 'vīí dā's?ū ū ú) (mīcūī 'dīī nīcuī'dáádō 's?ūūú)

(The \* indicates a violation of the procedure as outlined. A syntactic group ending in a mid tone followed by a syntactic group beginning with a mid tone should be in the same tone bracket although not necessarily on the same note. However, the intonation pattern of Cuicateco permitted a drop into the low bracket thus making the tune more interesting.)

Step one. Write out the words you wish to set to music writing in the stress (same as METHOD 1, Step two).

"Jēsū "Crístò "chʔīī nā "crúûs "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
Jesus Christ died on the cross for us all

'nādā"cuēé<sup>a</sup>yâ "yē<sup>a</sup>ʔè "yāī<sup>a</sup>yâ<sup>a</sup> "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
He arose again from the dead for us all

"māā<sup>a</sup> 'cē"ndūūchīyâ nā"jūūvī "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
Now he lives in heaven for us all

"mīīcū 'jāvâ"ʔáíyâ nā"jūūvī "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
And he prays in heaven for us all

"tōōʔmē cū"chīíyâ "tāāvē "né<sup>a</sup>ʔè "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
Then he will come again for us all

"cāātē "nāā<sup>a</sup>nū<sup>a</sup>yâ "tōdō "nūū<sup>a</sup>ndī "yē<sup>a</sup>ʔè'yú  
Because he washed (away) all the sins of ours

Step two. Number the vowels beginning with number 1 every time a stress occurs (same as METHOD 1, Step three).

"Jēsū "Crístò "chʔīī nā "crúûs "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
1 2 1 2 12 3 12 1 2 12

'nādā"cuēé<sup>a</sup>yâ "yē<sup>a</sup>ʔè "yāī<sup>a</sup>yâ<sup>a</sup> "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
3 4 12 3 1 2 12 3 1 2 12

"māā<sup>a</sup> 'cē"ndūūchī'yâ nā"jūūvī "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
12 3 12 3 4 5 12 3 1 2 12

"mīīcū 'jāvâ"ʔáíyâ nā"jūūvī "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
12 3 4 5 12 3 4 12 3 1 2 12

"tōōʔmē cū"chīíyâ "tāāvē "né<sup>a</sup>ʔè "cāvâ "chʔūū<sup>a</sup>  
12 3 4 12 3 12 3 1 2 1 2 12

"cāātē "nāā<sup>a</sup>nū<sup>a</sup>yâ "tōdō "nūū<sup>a</sup>ndī "yē<sup>a</sup>ʔè'yú  
12 3 12 3 4 1 2 12 3 1 2 3

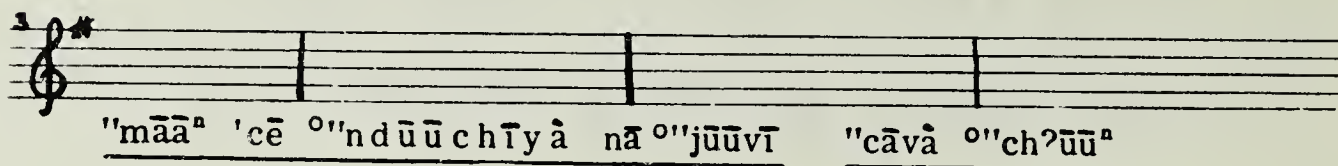
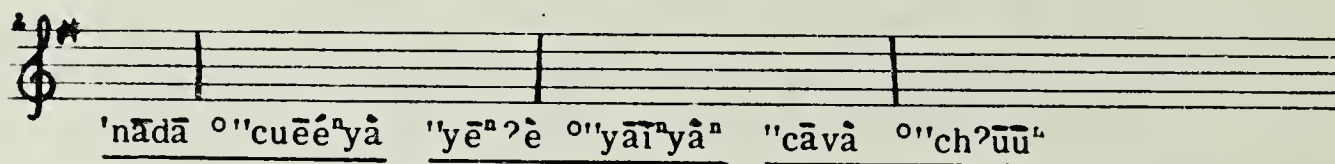
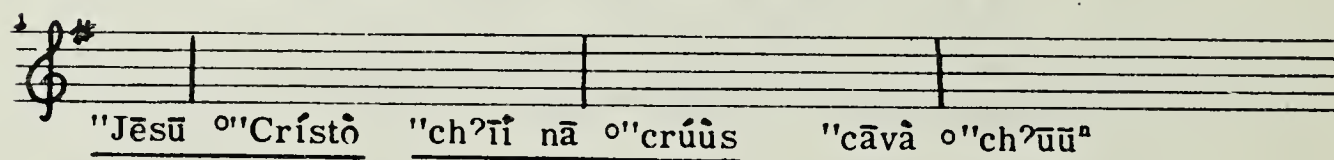
The count is:

- 1 - 2 occurs 15 times
- 1 - 2 - 3 occurs 11 times
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 occurs 4 times
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 occurs 2 times

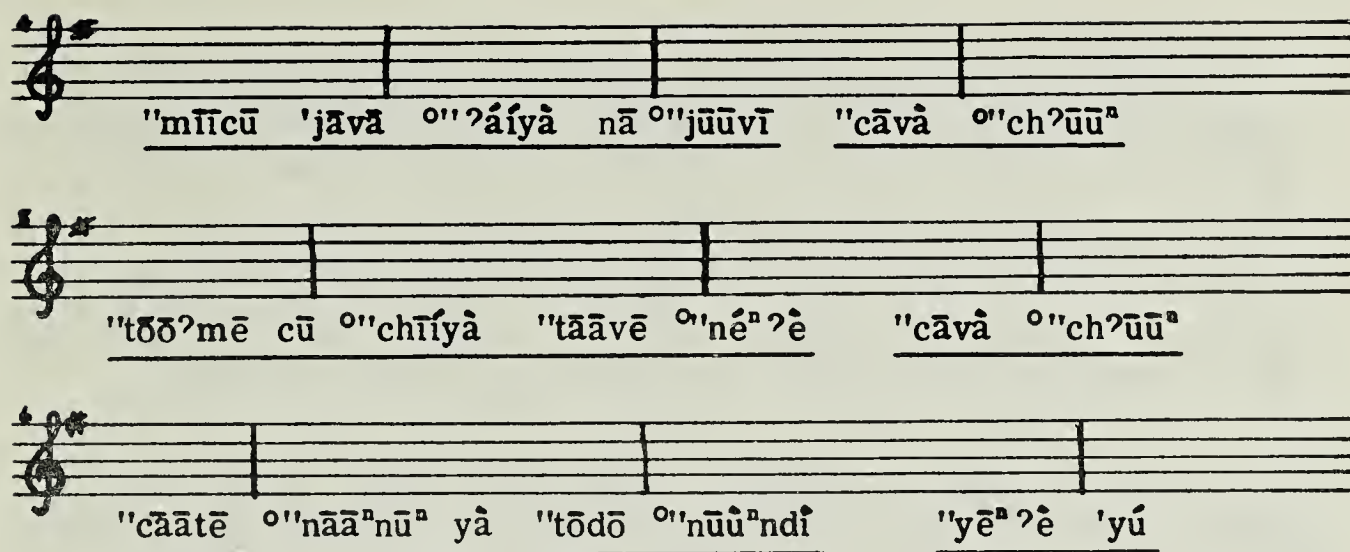


Step three. Choosing the time. 1 - 2 occurs the most times and 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 occurs four times. These two can be fitted into a measure of 4 beats with two of the 1 - 2 equal to 1 - 2 - 3 - 4. Where 1 - 2 - 3 occurs so many times, either the long vowel can be on a sustained note or a rest can be added to make the fourth beat. Where 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 occurs two times, the words should be examined to see if there is secondary word stress. Music also has primary and secondary stress where there are more than 3 beats to a measure. In languages where secondary word stress occurs, the secondary stress of the music and of the words can be made to coincide. Secondary stress usually occurs on compound words and follows a pattern. For example, in Cuicateco, the pattern of secondary word stress is either '1 - 2, 1 - 2 - 3 or 1 - 2 - 3, '1 - 2. If there is no secondary word stress, then the 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 must be squeezed into the 4 beats. As a result of the foregoing analysis, we will choose 4 beats to a measure and fit in the odd number of counts by choosing an eighth note (♪) to receive one beat. The composition will have more notes to a measure and it will have a more rapid pace. The time signature will then be 4/8. We will now choose one sharp (#), namely the key of "g", for the key signature. The beginning of the octave ("do") is the line G.

Step four. Write the words and accents (primary ", secondary ' and phrase °) under the staff leaving at least one space between syllables and two or more spaces between words. Next underline the pertinent syntactic constructions. Above the staff number the vowels from primary accent to primary accent. (See METHOD 1, Step five.)







Step five. Composition of melody. With the syntactic constructions as a guide read the words as you would any poem. With the phrase stresses as a guide you can mark off the beginning of the measures. There is one exception where a measure had to be marked off in line 6 in the middle of the word yē'ēyú. This does not destroy either the meter of the line or the time of the music. On the contrary, a measure is marked off in the music where it is absolutely essential.

Read the words over and over, many times, until the tones and the rhythm suggest a melody. This will come with practice to those who are musically inclined but will be more difficult for those who are not musically inclined. Try small portions at first, an underlined phrase at a time, in order to incorporate the tones and intonational patterns of the phrase. When a tune comes to your mind, write it down. It may take many tries to accomplish your goal. If you have an informant to help you, have him repeat the phrases over and over. Notice the various shades of intonation that are used. Where there is a slight rise in the speaking voice, or a slight lowering of the voice over and above the tone analysis, notes may be lowered or raised a note or two respectively. Stressed syllables may also be raised a note higher than their original tone if this is permissible in the language. This gives a greater variety of notes that may be potentially used in the composition.

As the portions of melody come to you, write them down even though you are not satisfied with the result. When you have finished your first attempt, examine it.

Example of first attempt:

"Jēsū "Crístò "ch ?î nā "crúus "cāvà "ch ?ūū"

'nā dā "cuēé"yà "yē" ?è "yāī"uā" "cāvà "ch ?ūū"

"māā" cē "ndūū chī yā nā "jūū vī "cāvà "ch ?ūū"

" mīīc ū 'jāvā" ?áíyā nā "jūū vī "cāvà "ch ?ūū"

"tōō ? mē cū "chīíyā "tāāvē "né" ?è "cāvà "ch ?ūū"

"cāātē "nāā" nū" yā "tōdō "nūū" ndī "yē" ?è 'yú

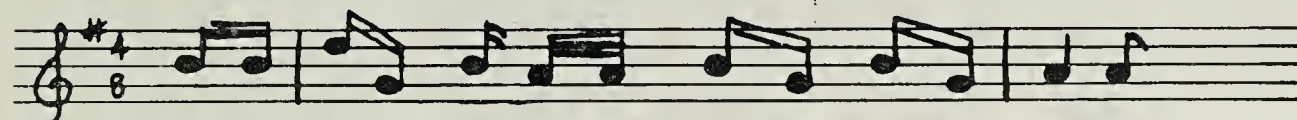
Notice places in the composition that have wide jumps or that have no catchy tune. Are there any portions that are repeated in the composition? There are sustained notes at the end of each line to set apart the complete thoughts as expressed in each line. This is acceptable in Cuicateco but may not be permitted in other languages. Rests could be placed at the end of each line in the place of the sustained notes.

Sing your composition to a native speaker, not your helper, and watch his reaction. He may be pleased and very attentive and may break out with a big smile. Try to find out his reactions to the song.

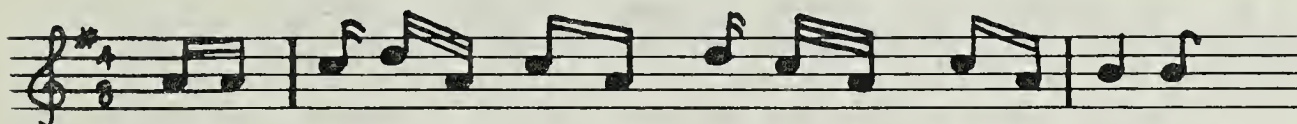
See if he understands it. Find out if he likes it, if it sounds good to him. He may ask you to sing it again. He may want to change it in some places. Have him sing it with you. Be quick to see if he makes any changes in it. Sing it over and over.

If you do not like your first attempt then try, try again until you are somewhat satisfied with your results before trying it out with the people.

Notice the second attempt. The changes are underlined.



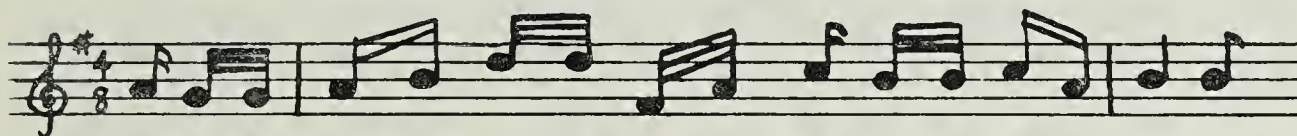
"Jēsū "Crístô "ch?īī nā "crúûs "cāvâ "ch?ūū"



'nādā "cuēē"yâ "yē"ê "yāī"yâ "cāvâ "ch?ūū"



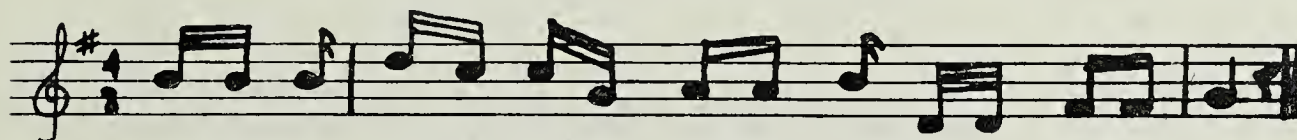
"māā" cē"ndūūchīyâ nā "jūūvī "cāvâ "ch?ūū"



"mīīcū 'jāvā "?áíyâ nā'jūūvī "cāvâ "ch?ūū"



"tōō?mē cū "chīíyâ "tāāvē "né"nē "cāvâ "ch?ūū"



"cāātē "nāā"nū"yâ "tōdō "nūū"ndī "yē"ê "yú"



Now notice the chorus as corrected by the natives. Changes are underlined.

"Jēsū "Crístò "ch ?īī nā "crúūs "cāvā "ch ?ūū"

'nādā "cuēé"yā "yē" ?è "yāī"yā "cāvā "ch ?ūū"

"māā" cē" ndūūchī yā nā "jūūvī "cāvā "ch ?ūū"

"mīcū 'jāvā " ?áíyā nā " "jūūvī "cāvā "ch ?ūū"

"tōō ?mē cū "chīī yā "tāāvē "né" ?è "cāvā "ch ?ūū"

"cāātē "nāā"nū"yā "tōdō "nūū"ndī "yē" ?è 'yú

# Part V

## TRY OUT YOUR HYMNS BEFORE PRINTING THEM

The Eastern Otomi<sup>1</sup> workers have a good system set up for trying out their hymns. When a new hymn has been written, they mimeograph it there in the tribe (typewritten carbon copies would work just as well), pass the sheets out to the people whenever they come to sing and teach them the hymns. After several months, if it seems to go over well, if the people like it and pick it up quickly, then they add the copies of this new hymn to loose-leaf style hymnbooks.

If a hymn does not go over well, it should be set aside and reworked to find out why it did not go over, or else discarded before the people begin to memorize it. Workers who have had experience in hymn writing inform us that once the people in their tribe had learned the hymns by memory it was impossible to begin revising and polishing them. The people resented changes. They insisted that the hymns be left as they were, even if the people would never talk that way in everyday speech. The workers also suggest to keep looking for new ways of expressing the truths of the gospel in hymns and avoid the repeated usage of overworked phrases.

When some fifty hymns have been tested and found suitable, it is best to have them put into a permanent printed form.

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<sup>1</sup>An Indian tribe located in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico.

# Part VI

## RECORDING HYMNS

Do not put your hymns on records until you have tried them out for several months with the tribespeople and you are sure that the translation is as you want it. Some changes later on in a few unimportant words will not make too much difference. However, the way in which the hymn is recorded will be the way the tribespeople will learn it.

Only use a native singer if he can sing the tune accurately; otherwise, his people will not sing it right either. In many tribes more hymns are learned by the tribespeople through the records we make than by personal teaching.

When singing for a record you should slightly over-enunciate the words so that they will record clearly. The tribespeople do not seem to mind if the singer is not a Beverly Shea or a Marian Anderson as long as they can understand the words.



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